

RX DISCOVERY 2011: City of Valdez Floodplain Administrator Interview

Interview Notes

January 24, 2011, 4:00 pm MT, interview via conference call

Attendees: Laura Robertson, FPA, Planning/GIS Technician, City of Valdez
Lisa Von Bargaen, Development Director, City of Valdez (limited participation)
Matthew Johnson, STARR Valdez Discovery Team
Bridget Beliveau, STARR Valdez Discovery Team
James Patiano, STARR Valdez Discovery Team

Thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. As you already know, FEMA's new Discovery process involves learning as much as possible about selected watersheds so that we can help the local officials identify the best projects for FEMA funding and implementation. Our goal with the interviews is to confirm the data we've collected so far with you, to find out other information about your community's flood-related issues, and to answer any questions you have about Discovery as best as we can.

Did you have a chance to look over the Fact Sheet and map we sent? How did the data look to you; do you have any corrections?

Overall information looks good. Some concern about the Coordinated Needs Management Strategy (CNMS) data: How are these areas identified? Some CNMS areas don't make sense, for example, areas far from town along coast that are steep, heavily timbered, and mountainous. Also, some gaps in the CNMS along streams (Allison Creek).

As you see on the Fact Sheet, we found that you have been involved in several presidentially-declared disasters. Does your community have any flooding-related educational efforts or special programs to support citizens and property owners who need flooding-related information or support?

An annual newsletter is prepared and sent to new and existing residents in flood prone areas. Laura will like to expand outreach with media sources like a television commercial.

One indicator that an area may need a new study is a significant number of Letters of Map Amendment (LOMAs) along a flooding source. We found that you had Letters of Map Change (LOMCs) in the community - do you know if they were clumped together at all? If so, can you note the location on the map?

Clumped LOMCs are located in two flood prone areas:

- Alpine Woods subdivision, and
- Cottonwood subdivision: entire area elevated on fill behind a dike to remove from the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).

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We also saw that there were mitigation projects. Are these the only mitigation projects that you know of? Using the reference map we sent, can you tell us approximately where the project occurred?

Several homes were removed from a high avalanche hazard area in Valdez from Porcupine Street to the Corbin Creek Subdivision.

The Lowe River Dike, north of the Alpine Woods subdivision, is under construction. Phase 1 is complete, and Phase 2 will be constructed this upcoming summer. State and local funds are being used for this multi-million dollar project; FEMA grant funding not explored.

North Bridge crossing Mineral Creek to recreation area has been blown out and repaired twice.

Follow-up on mitigation: Are there other projects that you think are needed in your community? Where? Why? Would the community be willing to share costs for such a project? Have you worked with the State to request FEMA funds for the projects?

Valdez Glacier Creek ice jams and floods. The city barricades with rip rap annually, however the rip rap usually erodes. Potential project may be to establish solid barricade, or dredge the valley to promote migration of the stream away from this area. Also, Phase 2 of Lowe River Dike may be a suitable candidate. FEMA funding process not well understood. Community is willing to cost share.

We found that there were repetitive loss properties in the community - properties that had experienced flood problems enough to require repeat claims - or claims made for properties outside the mapped floodplain (Claims in Zones B, C, and X). Is that correct?

Correct. There is a home that is subjected to tidal surge flooding. The city has attempted to buy out the property; however the owner is not interested in leaving.

We collected levee data from the National Levee Database. Alaska levees have not been added to the database. Could you provide information about levee locations, owner, existing maintenance plan, when levee constructed and by whom, if it is shown on the current map as providing protection from the base flood, available documentation that the levee is compliant with 65.10.

Several man-made structures provide protection to subdivisions and other infrastructure in Valdez: the Lowe River Dikes, one protecting the Alpine Woods subdivision, and the other state owned dike protects the Richardson Highway. The Mineral Creek Dike protects the Cottonwood Subdivision and Homestead Road, and the state maintained levee on Valdez Glacier Creek protects the Richardson Highway. The city has a Dike Maintenance Plan and the levee is maintained by Public Works. This maintenance consists mainly of clearing brush from the dike. None of the dikes mentioned above are likely to have 65.10 documentation prepared.

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We found that there are no tribal entities in the watershed, does that sound right to you?

Correct.

We did not find any Environmentally Sensitive Areas, like wetlands, or critical species protection areas. Do you know of any that we may have missed?

Valdez has enacted the Valdez Coastal Management Plan which includes hazard areas, recreation areas, and important habitats. Duck Flats, located between Valdez proper and Old Valdez in a tidal flat, is a protected area with sensitive habitat.

FEMA has a database of best available topographic data and you can see the LiDAR Capture Area on maps we sent. Do you know of any other topographic data collection projects in the area or other available topo data? (We are looking for 1- and 2-foot contour data)?

Another LiDAR dataset exists, in addition to what is shown on the map from 1998 with 5' foot contour data. Also, bathymetry information has been collected to aid in a Tsunami study conducted by the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Laura will attempt to retrieve documentation on this dataset.

FEMA has been documenting areas where new studies may be needed in a data system called CNMS. On the map we sent to you, these mapping needs we know of are shown in red, and ones that are questionable or we need more information about on are shown in pink. Do these areas seem consistent with your thoughts on new study needs? Could you prioritize the areas within Valdez as far as what you believe to be most important to study soon? FEMA has limited funding for new studies, so I want to make sure we are including your most-desired study areas in our recommendations for a potential upcoming map project.

As mentioned before, the CNMS data is sporadic. Jack Bay not needed. Shoup Bay is not a priority but possibly is represented due to a sole old cabin in that area. Also, the south side of Lowe River and area near oil terminal is low priority. Three flood prone priority areas are the north side of Lowe River, Valdez Glacier Creek, and Mineral Creek. The Lowe River has migrated since the original flood study and has the highest priority in the vicinity of the Alpine Woods Subdivision. Residents from this subdivision have a strong voice in the community. As mentioned in the mitigation section above, Valdez Glacier Creek, also highly migratory and does not impact many properties, but will potentially impact the city's landfill. Lastly, in addition to riverine flooding from Mineral Creek, the Mineral Creek Loop Road has some coastal tidal flooding issues, as well.

Follow-up on study needs: Are there any additional mapping needs not shown? Why do they need a new study?

The areas mentioned above are the main flooding sources for the community and, as noted above, because of the highly active lateral movement of the streams, the studies are out of date.

Follow-up on study needs: Are you aware of any existing studies, maybe completed by the community or developers or the DOT? IF YES, We need to have those studies in hand before the Discovery meeting. Can you send us either a pdf or hard copy?

A small section of the Lowe River was studied at the Alpine Woods Subdivision after large floods in 2006 that impacted many homes. The Alyeska (Trans-Alaska) Pipeline, likely has an abundance of hydrologic and hydraulic information for the area in the vicinity of the pipeline. Laura frequently attempts to obtain information from the pipeline's operator, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company without success. Also, the Cottonwood Subdivision fill project required a flood study for Mineral Creek, but it is probably from the 1980s. Laura will send these documents with the local GIS data we've requested.

As you probably know, FEMA requires a mitigation plan for any community to be eligible to receive disaster assistance (funding). We didn't see a specific flood mitigation plan for your community on your website, but FEMA reported that you have a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) for the City of Valdez. Does that sound right to you? Do you have plans to update the mitigation plan by that time?

After the 2006 flood, the city prepared the LHMP for FEMA to be eligible for disaster assistance.

Does your community have a GIS specialist? We have collected a lot of GIS data, but appreciate including local GIS layers. We are looking for local transportation layers, political boundaries, land use data, parcel data, building footprints, essential facility data, inundation areas from historic flooding, coastal data... if not, that's fine too.

Laura is also the GIS specialist for the City of Valdez. She is sending GIS data.

Do you know of any recent transportation projects, like replaced bridges or culverts, or highway reconstruction that were in the floodplain? Many times transportation projects are not quickly reflected in the flood maps. Can you tell us the location and date?

The state is planning to restore the levee, damaged from the floods in 2006, just downstream of Keystone Canyon this summer to its pre-flood condition.

Are there areas of rapid growth or development that may have affected the water runoff or were close to floodplains? Were any Letters of Map Revision (LOMRs) performed as part of the development? How about other land changes, like wildfires or landslides?

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No significant growth is occurring in Valdez. The Corbin Creek Subdivision was developed to relocate the folks from the high avalanche hazard area but has gravel roads. The Robe River Subdivision was developed as a low density area with large parcels.

As part of Discovery, FEMA wants to support local officials in educating their residents about flood risk. We would like to ask a few questions about your community's communication strategies. If new flood studies were performed for the study areas shown by the CNMS' red and pink lines, what is your sense of how the residents would receive the new flood study results and associated flood maps? (believers, skeptical/non-believers, defiant)

Mix of all attitudes expected. The Alpine Woods Subdivision is calling for revisions to the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) so the majority will accept new data; however there will be some property owners in revised or new floodplains that will be unhappy.

Because no two communities are alike and come in so many types and sizes, they all have unique outreach needs. We collected demographic data and found that there is a very low rate of non-English speakers, about a 9% population of folks over 65, and 13% population of Native Americans. Does this seem correct to you? Have you found any particular type of outreach that works better to communicate risk to these groups?

The data seems a bit off. The 9% non-English speakers could be attributed to the seasonal migrant workers from Philippines (although they shouldn't be in the 2000 US Census data), although walking down the street in Valdez, you're not likely to come across a non-English speaker. There are some native people living in Valdez, the figure seems high, but could be due to natives working for Alyeska Pipeline, but most travel from Anchorage.

Each community has unique opportunities and challenges for outreach due to their local floodplain management programs and the local conditions that impact that community. Your community has some flooding issues with dikes and potentially some coastal flooding issues? What is the current awareness level about flood risk among your citizens?

Some people don't have insurance that should. The total number of policies should be higher. The city council has increased their awareness for flood issues, with enforcement becoming a priority. Some citizens have an impression that the Federal government should not impose Federal regulations on small town Alaska.

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At the end of a Risk MAP project, FEMA will provide you with new data and risk assessment tools that will help you and your residents better understand and visualize your risks. With customizable outreach tools and templates provided by FEMA, would you and/or your community be willing to take a proactive approach in educating people who live and work in your community about their risk and the steps they can take to protect themselves?

Laura will like to see expanded outreach for flood awareness. Currently, they have an annual newsletter, but she will like to expand to a commercial.

Follow up on outreach tools: If yes, would you be willing to have a future call/meeting to discuss the community's capabilities and support resources that may be needed from FEMA? Who else should we include on that call that has knowledge about existing community outreach? Specifically, we would discuss things like website information and email lists; mailings to citizens and key stakeholders; press releases and media briefings; public meetings; and other outreach efforts.

Yes. Level of interest is high. The city clerk is responsible for public notices and press releases and should be included. Lisa Von Bargen, Community Development Director, should be included. A person from the city's Information Technology (IT) department should be notified to update the city website.

Is there anything else you think we should know or include on our map?

The city of Valdez has great local GIS data, in addition to aerial imagery; they will supply to enhance the Discovery Map for the meeting.

Thank you so much for spending the time to talk with us.

On January 28th, 2011 Laura Robertson uploaded several background documents to our ftp site. These documents have been saved in a Local Data folder within the Interview folder.

